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DEPT FOR PM A/S HILLEN FROM THE AMBASSADOR

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR MARCH 29 US-AZERBAIJAN
POLITICAL-MILITARY CONSULTATIONS

REF: A. BAKU 347
[1](#)B. BAKU 348

Classified By: Ambassador Reno L. Harnish III per 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The March 29 political-military consultations are an important opportunity to broaden our strong security relationship. Strategically located in the heart of the Greater Middle East, Azerbaijan provides excellent cooperation on security issues and looks for opportunities to do still more. As President Aliyev has told us many times, however, the GOAJ looks to the USG to take the lead on these issues; the pol-mil talks are an opportunity to do just that. Key issues that should be addressed in the talks include upgrades to Nasosnoya Air Base and Azerbaijan's national security strategy, both of which are required under Azerbaijan's NATO IPAP and essential to our own security goals for the region. The Caspian Sea WMD interdiction programs are at a critical juncture, dependent on still pending GOAJ decisions to bring the navy into the programs and establish a Joint Command and Control Center. Your involvement could help resolve these long-standing issues, permitting the USG to move forward on phase 3 (USD 16 million) of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. Regional issues factor prominently in Azerbaijan's pol-mil calculus, and the GOAJ will want an update on U.S. policy on Iran. Azerbaijan also is eager to discuss the political-military aspects of a possible Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal, and seeks USG views on possible demining and reconstruction assistance, as well the structure of a possible peacekeeping force. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The March 29 political-military consultations -- the first since 2004 -- are an important opportunity to broaden the bilateral relationship. EUR A/S Fried highlighted the talks in his March 14 meeting with President Aliyev and, as demonstrated by the GOAJ's robust delegation, it is clear the GOAJ also views the talks as an important opportunity. Led by Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov, the delegation will also include Deputy Minister of National Security Fuad Iskenderov, Deputy Chief of the State Border Service Major General Farhad Tagizade, and Admiral Shahin Sultanov, Commander of the Naval Forces. The delegation's emphasis on Border Guards and Naval Forces reflect the important role that the Caspian Guard Initiative plays in our bilateral security relationship; it also provides an excellent opportunity to press for more inter-ministerial cooperation on our Caspian WMD interdiction programs.

NATO IPAP ISSUES

13. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov, who is leading the GOAJ delegation, will arrive in Washington fresh from consultations with NATO on Azerbaijan's IPAP. While the specifics of IPAP implementation are not on the agenda for the March 29 talks, the issues that Azimov will have discussed in Brussels are central to the continuing reform of Azerbaijan's military and to the future of our bilateral relationship. In our view, the pol-mil consultations present an invaluable opportunity to present our views and press the GOAJ for greater progress on Nasosnoya Air Base, the National Security Strategy, and development of a non-commissioned officer corps.

14. (S) On March 17, Ambassador Harnish presented the U.S. feasibility study of Nasosnoya Air Base to Minister of Defense Safar Abiyev. Upgrade of the air base to NATO standards is an integral part of Azerbaijan's IPAP, and also would greatly enhance our ability to provide gas-and-go services for NATO aircraft bound for Afghanistan. Military flight volumes are increasing with over 30 landings since the beginning of the year. We ultimately will need to switch from our current operations at Baku's Heydar Aliyev International Airport to a more secure and discreet location at the Nasosnoya Air Base outside Baku. While President Aliyev will be the ultimate decision-maker on this issue, the pol-mil consultations provide an invaluable opportunity to brief Azimov -- a key advisor on this issue -- on Washington's latest thinking on Nasosnoya. We were pleased when we learned March 23 that the MOD had named a project officer and expert staff for the project. Now, we should encourage the delegation to set aside funding.

15. (C) As part of the NATO IPAP, Azerbaijan has committed to developing a national security strategy and a national

military strategy. Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov is leading the charge but has encountered some resistance within the GOAJ. Rivalry is fierce between Azimov and the Ministry of Defense over the strategies, particularly as NATO integration will force the uniformed leadership at the MOD to relinquish control to civilian authorities. Azerbaijan has promised to complete its National Security Strategy by 2006; some encouragement from Washington on this critical subject would be very helpful. The U.S. has offered a great deal of assistance in Azerbaijan's development of the strategies; you should ask Azimov whether further assistance is needed. Similarly, U.S. encouragement on GOAJ plans to develop a noncommissioned officers corps would be equally helpful. FMF funds and our cooperation with the Oklahoma National Guard are developing an NCO academy. Now, the MOD needs to rethink the role of officers and the NCO's leadership of soldiers. The Azerbaijani military's lack of working-level expertise is a serious impediment to defense reform and the GOAJ's ability to attain NATO interoperability, a key US policy goal.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

16. (S/NF) Azerbaijan has been a steadfast partner in the Global War on Terror, contributing peacekeeping troops in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, and pledging to stay in Iraq as long as US troops remain there. The pol-mil consultations are an excellent opportunity to reaffirm our gratitude to Azerbaijan for its support. Counterterrorism cooperation is at an all-time high, including the arrest and rendition of several terrorists with links to Al-Qaida. The GOAJ's very capable Ministry of National Security (represented by Deputy Minister Iskenderov looks to deepen this cooperation.

WMD NON-PROLIFERATION

17. (C) With funding from CTR, DTRA, EXBS and the Department of Energy, the USG has made great strides in improving Azerbaijan's ability to detect and interdict weapons of mass destruction. Under the rubric of the Proliferation Prevention Initiative (PPI), we have established an Interim

Command and Control Center which has greatly enhanced the GOAJ's ability to interdict WMD on the Caspian. Further progress on WMD non-proliferation depends on the GOAJ taking action to bring the Navy into the operations (which currently include only the Maritime Border Guard), and establishing a Joint Command and Control Center (JC3) under the Caspian Guard Initiative framework. If the GOAJ implements these two steps, the USG is ready to follow through with an additional USD 16 million in funding for the third phase of the program.

The Ambassador raised this in a March 2 meeting with President Aliyev (ref a) but the GOAJ bureaucracy has been slow to take the necessary steps. Your reiteration of the importance of bringing the navy into WMD interdiction efforts and moving forward quickly on the JC3 would be very helpful. You could also remind the delegation that despite the GOAJ's deep cooperation on counter-proliferation, it has not yet signed up for the PSI, a fact that could leave them in the cold for the June summit.

THE REGIONAL CHALLENGES

18. (C) Azerbaijan's views on political-military issues are colored by what GOAJ officials aptly describe as their "difficult neighborhood." Since independence, the GOAJ has pursued a strategic policy that safeguards its independence by tying Azerbaijan to the Euro-Atlantic structure. It also has played a leading role in GUAM, an organization that was created as a counterbalance to Russia's influence in the region. We are mystified by regular reports of Azerbaijani footdragging on GUAM and believe they stem from differences with Georgian and Ukraine over the "Democratic Choice" initiative proposed by those two countries. It would be useful to ask Azimov for his views on GUAM. Azerbaijan keeps a constant, wary eye on Russia and Iran and is careful not to do anything that would provoke its more powerful neighbors. For this reason, although senior GOAJ officials privately tell us they are worried about Iran's nuclear programs, they never have publicly condemned Iran's nuclear ambitions. The GOAJ relies instead on carefully crafted language that supports all nations' rights to pursue peaceful nuclear programs while upholding international commitments. The GOAJ is anxious about the international community's growing moves against Iran's nuclear programs and fears the repercussions

of any actions -- whether economic or military -- against Azerbaijan.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

19. (C) Azimov has also asked that the political-military aspects of a possible Nagorno-Karabakh peace settlement be added to the agenda (ref b). While the details of a possible settlement are being considered by EUR Senior Advisor Steve Mann and the other OSCE Minsk Group Chairs, the pol-mil consultations present an important opportunity to hear Azerbaijan's perspectives on possible post-settlement needs. Azimov is interested specifically in hearing US views on a post-settlement assessment of the demining and reconstruction needs in the Occupied Territories, as well as the possible options for a peacekeeping force.

HARNISH